

48. (SBU) On February 20, Ambassador held a meeting with Health Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva. De Silva described additional measures taken to support IDP populations in Vavuniya, including several movements of 250 IDP doctors from Vavuniya Region, creation of a Government health post at each of the transit camps, and the dispatch of a mobile laboratory to Vavuniya. De Silva also noted that all local hospitals in the north were operating at maximum capacity and that their ability to respond is constrained by the

tight security in the area and fear of suicide attacks. He requested additional supplies to meet the surge in needs (preventative and curative), and potentially the need for additional doctors and mobile infrastructure (examination tents) as IDPs were now occupying most of the vacant buildings in Vavuniya. (Note: an NGO contact reports that the Vavuniya Hospital is now overstretched, but that hospital staff have been instructed to submit requests to the Ministry of Health, not work directly with international organizations.)

¶9. (U) USAID-funded NGO partner United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) reported that they were able to visit four transit sites in Vavuniya last week. Cluster teams (UN/NGO interagency coordination meetings on protection, shelter, water/sanitation, etc.) are responding to the basic needs of the displaced, however, UMCOR reports that some gaps are appearing in the shelter and sanitation sectors. Family separation remains an acute problem.

¶10. (U) Food into Safe Zone: WFP continues to work with the Government on use of two tugboats now in Trincomalee with the potential to transport up to 300 MT of food per week to the safe zone. At present, the ICRC ferry has been able to take 10 MTs per trip. A vessel leaving on February 23 will carry 8 MTs of wheat flour, and 1 MT each of oil and sugar. ICRC advised that the Assistant Government Agent in Puthumathalan (within LTTE-controlled area) has people well organized for food distribution, as well as fishing boats to take the food from the tugs to the beach.

¶11. (U) Food to Vavuniya District IDP sites: Temporary kitchen facilities are being set up in all the transit sites. WFP has begun releasing dry rations for each site, working under agreements with local NGOs that pick up the food, deliver it to the sites, and oversee food preparation with the IDPs. WFP is awaiting final approval of its request for \$3.1 million in CERF funds for the procurement of local rice.

Reported Civilian Casualties

¶12. (SBU) The UN relayed a report of shelling of the perimeter of the safe zone on the night of February 22. The UN cannot determine the source of the shelling, and does not yet have information on any possible casualties. Tamil sources from within the LTTE-controlled area claim 125 civilians killed and 302 injured on February 20-22. Reportedly, 23 persons reached Government-controlled territory on February 22. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are frequently exaggerated.)

MOORE